

Appln No. 09/944,534
Amdt date May 12, 2009
Reply to Office action of June 30, 2008

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A method for controlling the distribution of expiring free postage value in a PC postage system, which free postage value is provided free of charge by a third party to a user and will expire after a time period has elapsed if such free postage is not used up by the user, as opposed to postage value owned by the user which will not expire after a period of time has elapsed, the method comprising the steps of:

the third party transferring a first portion of said expiring free postage value provided by the third party to a user's postage meter;

storing a second portion of said expiring free postage value in a free postage account for the user at a third party server; and

resetting a balance of said free postage account for the user in the third party server upon expiration of said free postage value after [[a]] the time period has elapsed.

2. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of establishing minimum threshold for said postage meter and transferring a block of postage value from said free postage account to said postage meter when balance of said postage meter is less than or equal to said threshold.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2 further comprising the step of decrementing said free postage account in accordance with said block of transferred postage.

4. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of storing purchased postage value in an available postage account.

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5. (Previously presented) The method of claim 4 further comprising the step of utilizing said expiring free postage value before said purchased postage value.
6. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of displaying a sum of total expiring free postage value and purchased postage value in an available postage field.
7. (Original) The method of claim 6 further comprising the step of decrementing said available postage field in accordance with a print transaction.
8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7 further comprising the step of utilizing said expiring free postage value before said purchased postage value.
9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising notifying user upon expiration of said free postage value.
10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of storing purchased postage value and balance of the postage meter in a descending register.
11. (Original) The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of decrementing descending register in accordance with a print transaction.
12. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of determining whether postage meter balance is equal to or greater than a predetermined threshold.

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13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 12 further comprising the step of transferring a block of free postage value from said free postage account to said postage meter in accordance with said threshold determination.
14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of determining validity of said expiring free postage value in response to receipt of a print postage request and wherein said free postage account is reset in accordance with said validity determination.
15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 14 further comprising the step of determining whether balance of said free postage value is equal to or greater than a value of requested postage and transferring a block of free postage value from said free postage account to said postage meter in accordance with the amount determination.
16. (Original) The method of claim 15 further comprising the step of decrementing said free postage account in accordance with the transferred postage.
17. (Original) The method of claim 15 further comprising the step of generating print image in accordance with said amount determination.
18. (Previously presented) The method of claim 14 further comprising the step of determining whether balance of total purchased postage value and free postage value is equal to or greater than value of requested postage.
19. (Original) The method of claim 18 further comprising the step of generating error message in accordance with said amount determination.

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20. (Original) The method of claim 18 further comprising the step of generating print image in accordance with said amount determination.

21. (Currently amended) A method for controlling the distribution of expiring free postage in a PC postage system, which free postage value is provided free of charge by a third party to a user and will expire after a time period has elapsed if such free postage is not used up by the user, as opposed to postage value owned by the user which will not expire after a period of time has elapsed, the method comprising the steps of:

storing said expiring free postage value provided by the third party in a free postage account for the user at a third party server;

transferring a portion of said expiring free postage value from said free postage account to a user's postage meter in accordance with a print postage request; and

resetting a balance of said free postage account for the user in the third party server upon expiration of said free postage value after [[a]] the time period has elapsed.

22. (Previously presented) The method of claim 21 further comprising the step of decrementing said free postage account in accordance with said transferred postage value.

23. (Previously presented) The method of claim 21 further comprising the step of displaying sum of the expiring free postage value and purchased postage value in an available postage field.

24. (Original) The method of claim 23 further comprising the step of decrementing said available postage field in accordance with a print transaction.

25. (Previously presented) The method of claim 24 further comprising the step of utilizing said expiring free postage value before said purchased postage.

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26. (Previously presented) The method of claim 21 further comprising the steps of determining the validity of said expiring free postage value in response to receipt of said print postage request, wherein said free postage account is reset in accordance with said validity determination.
27. (Previously presented) The method of claim 26 further comprising the step of determining whether balance of free postage account is equal to or greater than value of requested postage and wherein the step of transferring a portion of the expiring free postage value to said postage meter comprises transferring a portion of the expiring free postage value in accordance with the amount determination.
28. (Previously presented) The method of claim 27 further comprising the step of decrementing said free postage account in accordance with the transferred postage value.
29. (Original) The method of claim 27 further comprising the step of generating print image in accordance with said amount determination.
30. (Previously presented) The method of claim 26 further comprising the step of determining whether balance of total purchased postage value and free postage value is equal to or greater than value of requested postage.
31. (Original) The method of claim 30 further comprising the step of generating error message in accordance with said amount determination.
32. (Original) The method of claim 30 further comprising the step of generating print image in accordance with said amount determination.

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33. (Currently amended) A PC postage system that controls the distribution of expiring free postage value, which free postage value is provided free of charge by a third party to a user and will expire after a time period has elapsed if such free postage is not used up by the user, as opposed to postage value owned by the user which will not expire after a period of time has elapsed, the system, comprising:

means for storing expiring free postage value provided by a third party to a user in a free postage account for the user at a third party server;

means for transferring a portion of said expiring free postage value from said free postage account to a postage meter of the user in accordance with a print postage request; and

means for resetting a balance of said free postage account for the user in the third party server upon expiration of said free postage value after [[a]] the time period has elapsed.

34. (Previously presented) The PC postage system of claim 33 further comprising means for decrementing said free postage account in accordance with said transferred postage value.

35. (Previously presented) The PC postage system of claim 33 further comprising means for displaying sum of the expiring free postage value and purchased postage value in an available postage field.

36. (Original) PC postage system of claim 35 further comprising means for decrementing said available postage field in accordance with a print transaction.

37. (Previously presented) The PC postage system of claim 33 further comprising means for determining validity of said expiring free postage value in response to receipt of said print postage request, wherein said free postage account is reset in accordance with said validity determination.

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38. (Currently amended) A method of managing free postage in a computer postage system, which free postage is provided free of charge by a third party to a user and will expire after a time period has elapsed if such free postage is not used up by the user, as opposed to postage value owned by the user which will not expire after a period of time has elapsed, the method comprising:

generating an account to track free postage value separate from purchased postage value, which account is maintained by a third party;

receiving a request to print postage by a user's computer;

checking for free postage value availability in the account;

checking for expiration of free postage value in the account; and

setting a balance of the account to zero when the free postage value has expired after [[a]] the time period has elapsed.

39. (Previously presented) The method of managing free postage in a computer postage system of claim 38, further comprising:

applying available free postage value to the request to print postage if free postage value is available; and

applying purchased postage to the request to print postage if free postage value is not available.